

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Public education: Cost no object

In recent columns, we've been discussing the Pottstown School District's comprehensive planning process now underway.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) requires all Pennsylvania school districts to submit a three-year comprehensive plan to the state every three years.

Although they are called "plans," they are really a catalogue of all the things each district says it is doing to comply with a mind-numbing array of state mandates and regulations. More than 80 topics must be covered.

Curiously, cost is not one of them. Apparently, to PDE, money is no object.

Pennsylvania spends more, per pupil, than all but seven other states and the District of Columbia for K-12 education.

However, state government in Pennsylvania contributes less to the cost of education than all but three states. And as anyone not living in a cave knows, the state doesn't follow its own "fair funding" formula, which shortchanges Pottstown by \$13 million a year while other districts receive excess funding.



Commentary by  
Tom Hylton

So Pottstown property owners bear the educational tax burden. As the chart at right shows, Pottstown taxpayers contributed more than \$35 million last year for the education of about 3,700 students, which includes some 300 students enrolled in bricks and mortar and cyber charter schools.

There are no restrictions on parents enrolling students at any time during the year or withdrawing them to go somewhere else. Each year, about 20 percent of the students who enroll in the fall are gone by the end of the year, replaced by others who enter school sometime during the year. The school district just has to deal with the disruptions.

When it comes to special education, there is no upper limit on how much a school district must spend to provide a "free appropriate public education" (as it is called in the school code) to a student with a disability. If a student qualifies, he or she is provided with a detailed document called an IEP (Individualized Education Program), which contains a precise description of the student's handicap and remedies for overcoming it.

This document is developed not by any one teacher, but by a "team" which must by law include an administrator, a special education teacher, a general education teacher, and a parent. It can also include other specialists and an advocate chosen by the parent.

No one on the team has reason to be concerned about the cost. In fact, the overwhelming majority of school community members believe we're not spending enough.

No wonder the cost of public education has more than doubled in recent decades, even after accounting for inflation.

There's no evidence student outcomes have significantly improved. So we have to ask, just what does all this spending accomplish?

*Tom Hylton is a member of the Pottstown School Board. However, the views expressed are his alone and not the board's.*

**Pottstown taxes are consistently in the top 2 to 3 percent of Pennsylvania's 500 school districts.**

Pottstown taxation rank of 500 school districts in Pennsylvania	
2007-2008	11
2008-2009	16
2009-2010	7
2010-2011	12
2011-2012	10
2012-2013	12
2013-2014	12
2014-2015	3
2015-2016	3
2016-2017	6
2017-2018	7
2018-2019	6

Source of PSD funding 2020-2021 school year		
Local	55%	\$35,511,647
State	42%	\$27,475,373
Federal	3%	\$2,381,663